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Christoph Werner

- 1 A highly impressive and voluminous monograph, Şefatgol's « Structure of Religious Thought and Institutions in Safavid Iran: A History of Religious Developments in Iran from the 10th to the 12th Century hijri » is bound to set new standards in the scholarship on Safavid Iran and will also serve as a new model for analytical, rather than descriptive historiography inside the Iranian academic community. Şefatgol emphasizes the importance to understand the rise and development of religious structures as a key point of distinction between advanced agrarian societies, and with regard to the Safavid period, understands the development of religious institutions as a product of the necessities of both state and society. Central questions comprise the relation between political and religious structures in the Safavid period, and in which way the results and benefits of the institutionalization of religious structures can be characterized and evaluated from a more general perspective.
- 2 Rigidly structured itself, the study is divided into five main chapters. In the introduction, Şefatgol sets out with a discussion of relevant sources and a re-evaluation of previous research. The first chapter offers a chronological overview of Safavid social and political history, and discusses the specifics of Safavid political structures, with a special focus on its later years. As a mirror to the first, the second chapter outlines religious structures and institutions, and their role in the proliferation of Shiism. No discussion of religious institutions is possible without recourse to their economic bases, which is the focus of the

third chapter that contains also a detailed examination of endowments and their role in the Safavid period. The administrative aspects of religion and state-sponsored official religio-juridical positions are treated in the fourth chapter that reserves special attention to the years of Šāh Solṭān Ḥoseyn and the position of *mollābāšī*. The final chapter is devoted to developments in religious thought, especially in relation to the question of political legitimacy and the wider issue of *mašrūṭiyyat*. The important role of new converts to Islam (*jadīd al-islāmān*) in this respect is noted as a final ‘encore’.

- 3 This rough outline of contents is not able to do justice to the numerous issues raised in this study that is the first attempt to present a comprehensive account of structural religious developments in Iran from a historical perspective. Its value lies particularly in the wide range of employed sources, many of them hitherto completely unnoticed manuscripts and documents from Iranian and British libraries that allow Şefatgol to correct and adjust many previously made statements on Safavid religious life. Especially welcome is the focus on the ‘post-Šāh ‘Abbās I’ period, that opens a fresh look on the 17th/11th century beyond the standard paradigm of late-Safavid decline.

INDEX

Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qājārs

nompropre Safavides

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